

TWO OLD SALTS (from page 28)

“Every year we have changed something on the boat, like LED floodlights on the upper deck. It doesn’t scare the fish off at all,” Don said.

When the conversation moved to gear and hardware, Peter said, “I’ve always been a fan of spinning reels. I think Penn always made the best reels and I think they still do.” He still fishes some Penn 560’s. Don preferred the Calcutta 400 but has recently switched to Avet reels. They each carry a fluke rod. Peter reaches for a Penn 360 baitcaster while Don opts for a small Garcia reel.

They fish eels primarily. “The larger the bait you have the larger the fish you’re going to attract,” said Peter. Simple, sage advice.

Don chuckled at how Peter will spend all kinds of time choosing his eels, so they’ve agreed to pick out their own. Peter selects eels about 16” long with white bellies that are stored in the boat’s live well.

“Don’t knock them out. Use a cloth, slide the hook through the chin and out through the eye socket then get it quickly over the side,” Peter advised. Peter likes to throw an unweighted eel if he sees bass feeding on the surface.

“With circle hooks,” which they’ve used since the sixties, Don said, “the stripers hook themselves. When the line starts singing, that’s when you take the rod from the holder.” Their preferred method is rigging eels with two ounce egg sinkers three feet off the bottom but six or eight ounce will be used in certain conditions. As for line, the two agreed on braid. “Over the years, we’ve used it all,” Don said, adding that they prefer the brand Tough Line.

That 70 pound record fish was a story. It was a relatively slow night, near The Peanut, half a mile to a quarter mile west of The Peanut. It was 3 a.m. Peter was tired from reeling in fish, it was dead low tide, he had a chewed up eel on the hook, so he put the rod in the holder, went for a cigarette and a coffee. That’s when it hit.

Don said, “The funny thing is, Peter was going to put it back.” He had released a larger fish the week prior on the same spot. Then they figured it was somewhere between the state and world record.

Peter’s first record was 35 minutes on the hook and she

spooled him twice. The second was less than ten minutes. It swam to the boat and then swam to the net. These two guys are unbelievable.

By 5 a.m. they were heading in because there was no place on Block Island to weigh the fish. They headed for Snug Harbor, which opened at 5 a.m. They agreed that bass lost five pounds in the 98 degree heat because they didn’t have enough ice or a live well large enough to handle that fish.

Their measurements were saying the fish weighed more than 80 pounds.

Talking to a few captain on the steam to Snug Harbor, Captain Andy Deangelo weighed in, saying that fish likely weighed between 50 and 60 pounds Peter reminded him that Andy never caught a bass over 70 pounds. Drop the mic.

“There’s definitely fewer bass. We’ve been saying that for the last four or five years that there’s less fish,” Don said. Has the striper population changed because of fishing pressure? Surely that’s not helping. Peter said that when he was a kid, the crowd was zero. Those were the days. “After the moratorium, there were fish everywhere,” he added.

“The bulk of the boats we’re seeing are outside the 3 mile limit.”

That’s our reality right now and that’s the truth.

What’s the mix of boaters? “At one time is was mostly Massachusetts boats on the ledge. Now it’s a mixture of New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts,” Peter said.

“There’s nothing for the big cows to graze on. They’re chasing bait up on the surface,” Don added.

It seems they always fished for fish waiting for bait, now they’re fishing for fish chasing fish. One year, they caught and released a fifty pound bass they saw floundering on the surface. It had a four pound scup lodged in its mouth. After it swam away, Peter wondered about how big the bass while Don laughed that it probably was a state record scup.

This is a new phenomenon: warming waters, changing currents, invasive species.

It’s no hoax, our environment is changing, no matter what some fool at a podium tells you.

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Light tackle fishing
striped bass,
bluefish, bonito
false albacore



Connecticut
and
Block Island
Sound

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